



'Grey's Anatomy's' Shonda Rhimes on Possible Spinoff, Creative PTSD and Katherine Heigl Aftermath (Q&A)

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By Lesley Goldberg | The Hollywood Reporter – 15 hours ago



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After nine seasons and 200 episodes, Grey's Anatomy is showing no signs of slowing down. Season nine of the **Shonda Rhimes** medical series averaged a 4.1 rating among the key adults 18-to-49 demo, making it ABC's top scripted drama in the advertiser-coveted metric. The **Ellen Pompeo**- and **Patrick Dempsey**-led ensemble also ranked as the 10th-most-watched program overall in the demo and second-highest-rated overall, trailing only Fox's The Following.

As the show unspools its 10th season, with episode 200 airing Oct. 10 at 9 p.m., creator Rhimes will be tasked with writing out one of the show's most beloved characters, when **Sandra Oh**, who plays Cristina Yang, exits after the season finale. The producer behind ABC's hit Scandal also will be weighing uncertain futures for her two lead characters as Pompeo's and Dempsey's contracts are set to expire.

Rhimes, 43, a mother of three, tells THR about the challenges of rebooting Grey's every year, the importance of a cast who wants to be there and whether she'd do a second spinoff.

PHOTOS: The Doctors Are In: On the Set of 'Grey's Anatomy's' 200th Episode

It's unclear whether Patrick Dempsey and Ellen Pompeo will return after season 10. Should they opt to leave, how much longer will Grey's run?

I'll figure it out when we get there, but I'm not even thinking about "should they opt to continue on." Sandra isn't even gone yet. We still have an entire season to do.

Do you already know how this season ends?

This year, we're doing a split season -- 10A and 10B with 12 and 12 [episodes each] -- and we're focused on the first half of the season this year. That was my solution to cope with not knowing who's coming back. I'm not going to worry about what's going to happen because I have no control over that.

Is there a character you wish you'd never killed off or written out?

I probably wouldn't have blown up **Kyle Chandler** [in season three]. We were filming the episode and he was pitching me ideas on how he could stay.

Is there one character death or departure that proved the hardest?

Cristina's departure is going to be really emotional. Denny [**Jeffrey Dean Morgan**] dying was really difficult for us. I didn't want to do it, and he didn't want to come out of his trailer. I cried and everyone at the table read cried. He was a character that we had all become really close to. Lexie's [**Chyler Leigh**] death was devastating. It was hard to write, hard to be at the table read and hard to see on film.

PHOTOS: 'Grey's Anatomy's' Famous Departures

Over the course of the series, what has been your biggest challenge?

Keeping it fresh every season. The only way the show remains interesting to me creatively is if we're reinventing it at the beginning of every season. To find ways to do that as many times as we have has been a challenge.

What's been the most valuable lesson you've learned doing that?

Don't be afraid to tell a story. Be fearless, don't be afraid of the critics or the critics in your head. The hard stories are often the most interesting. I learned how to write television and run a show on Grey's Anatomy. I've made all my mistakes and learned a lot of valuable lessons here.

How did your experience on Grey's help to launch Scandal?

I learned on Grey's that you don't want anybody on your show that doesn't want to be there. I wanted Scandal to be a place where everyone that you're working with was a lovely, giving person who was as excited about this as we all were. There's no competition, no jealousy and no drama; it's just a family, and that's what Grey's is now.

Was there ever a time when you felt like Grey's wasn't a family? How did you handle that?

Absolutely. Creatively, that was a really difficult time, and it was hard for me to write the show. Seasons four and five were difficult because I was in a dark place [after **Katherine Heigl** said she had insufficient material and declined to submit herself for the Emmys]. In the beginning, it felt like such a magical place, and to discover that everyone isn't who you thought they were is very unfortunate.

Some awesome things did come out of it, though. I found the Callie [**Sara Ramirez**] and Erica [**Brooke Smith**] relationship and Owen [**Kevin McKidd**] in there. There were things that were amazing because they pull you through. A lot of us joke we have PTSD from that period of time -- and we do.

PHOTOS: The Couples of Shondaland: 'Grey's Anatomy,' 'Private Practice,' 'Scandal'

Your shows have always been socially relevant. Is there a subject that you have yet to take on that's on your radar?

Before we did the gun episode [in the two-part season-six finale], I would have said gun violence. It would be great if we did something about bullying. We did that with a kid that was encased in cement because his friends abused him into it. There are so many problems in the world that there's a lot that can be tackled.

Do you already know how the series ultimately will end?

No. I used to always have a final scene in mind, and we've passed the time in which that ending would happen. I had another final scene in mind, and I wrote it into an episode because I thought we were too far past when that could happen. I've done that five times with this show. This show does not seem to end. (Laughs.) I stopped trying to think about what the last moment of the show is going to be because we reinvent it at the beginning of every season, and it's a different show each

season.

You've already done Grey's spinoff Private Practice, which ended in January after six seasons. Have you considered a second spinoff?

I've thought about that. Every once in a while, I come up with a crazy idea. When we did our war episode where we saw Owen's past and the history of his PTSD, I always thought that was an amazing world, with the idea of a MASH unit. There are a lot of different worlds for a spinoff. Right now, Grey's is doing its thing and doing it well, and we don't need another spinoff at this moment in time.

STORY: 'Grey's Anatomy': Can Cristina and Owen Stay Apart?

What keeps you up at night? Two shows, a movie (War Correspondents), three kids ...

I have this new idea for a show, and it starts in my head and I'm trying to keep it there. I'm trying to focus on Grey's and Scandal. It's just that period of time where my brain starts clicking on something new again. I'm not going to say anything else because anything I say will get me a call from ABC saying, "What's this idea? What can we do?" That's what keeps me up. It's trying to not make more shows. (Laughs.)

What's been the best part of celebrating Grey's 200th episode?

Lately, I've encountered the first crop of girls who are graduating from medical school because they started watching Grey's Anatomy. Now they're writing to tell me where they got their residency. It's really moving that a television show can have enough impact to make women think that science is cool and want to be doctors. That feels humbling. I'm grateful and amazed that we've had 200 episodes.

THE CAST'S FAVORITE EPISODES

Jessica Capshaw (Arizona Robbins) Season 9's "Love the One You're With"

"Callie finds Arizona on the floor [after her leg amputation]. I didn't think I had the strength or talent to do it. I went to Shonda for help."

Justin Chambers (Alex Karev) Season 9's "Perfect Storm"

"It's nice that Alex has met his match in Jo. She can relate to growing up with struggles but getting through them and becoming a better person."

Gaius Charles (Shane Ross) Season 8's "This Magic Moment"

"I like Shane working hard to be on neuro with Dr. Shepherd. I'm a huge fan of the work [real-life] Dr. **Ben Carson** has done separating [conjoined] twins in the '80s."

Patrick Dempsey (Derek Shepherd) Pilot "A Hard Day's Night"

"It was a great big piece of magic. It wasn't one specific thing, it was the collective that made it work and that is why the show is successful."

Sarah Drew (April Kepner) Season 2's "Losing My Religion"

"The Izzie-Denny storyline is beautiful and heartbreaking and one of the things that hooked me from the beginning before I was even on the show."

Jerrika Hinton (Stephanie Edwards) Season 3's "Didn't We Almost Have It All?"

"Seeing Cristina crying in bed after Burke leaves. The whole 'Why am I still crying?!' was so good."

Camilla Luddington (Jo Wilson) Season 6's "Death and All His Friends"

"I was devastated that Meredith was pregnant during the shooting episodes and that she miscarried. I cried the whole episode."

Kevin McKidd (Owen Hunt) Season 5's "Elevator Love Letter"

"Owen combating PTSD and strangling Cristina felt very groundbreaking. People hadn't really done this before on TV, especially in primetime."

Sandra Oh (Cristina Yang) Season 10's "Piuttin' on the Ritz"

"When I said I was leaving at the 200th episode table read, my heart did squeeze and I felt a lump in my throat. Shooting was great, all in gowns in downtown L.A."

Ellen Pompeo (Meredith Grey) Season 2's "Break on Through"

"Three elderly women who were playing famous TV actresses in their day with one of them dying -- that was really moving."

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